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United States Attorney

Eastern District of Pennsylvania

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 23, 2006

10 CHARGED IN CONNECTION WITH METH & COCAINE OPERATION BASED IN SOUTHERN CHESTER COUNTY

Drug Kingpin Still At Large

PHILADELPHIA – United States Attorney Pat Meehan and DEA Special Agent-in-Charge James Kasson today announced the unsealing of a fifty-count indictment¹ against Rogelio Ortega and nine others charging them with conspiracy to distribute approximately 300 pounds of methamphetamine and more than 300 kilos of cocaine. Ortega is also charged with engaging in a continuing criminal enterprise, in violation of the “drug kingpin” statute.

The indictment charges that, from in or about 2002 through September 18, 2006, defendant Rogelio Ortega, a/k/a “Roger Ortega,” a/k/a “Gongo,” a/k/a “Ivan Soto,” operated a methamphetamine and cocaine packaging and distribution operation from Chester County, Pennsylvania, for which he obtained, from various sources of supply in Mexico and California, multi-kilogram quantities of methamphetamine, also known as “crystal,” and cocaine. According to the indictment, Ortega periodically traveled to Mexico and California to meet with drug suppliers, including defendants Humberto Preciado Avila and Pedro Gutierrez, and used cellular telephones to arrange and negotiate the purchase and delivery of large quantities of methamphetamine and cocaine to the southern Chester County area.

“This is a significant case for a number of reasons,” said Meehan. “We have shut down a major operation and identified a source of what is fast becoming law enforcement’s number one drug problem; crystal meth.”

The indictment further charges that when Rogelio Ortega traveled to Mexico and California, he entrusted the management of day-to-day methamphetamine and cocaine distribution operation to his brother, defendant Victor Ortega, who supervised workers for the organization, including

¹An Indictment or Information is an accusation. A defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

defendants Jose Luis Ortega, Jose Luis Vasquez, Rolando Martes-Ortega and Isidro Cortez-Melendez. According to the indictment, Jose Luis Ortega, Jose Luis Vasquez, Rolando Martes-Ortega and Isidro Cortez-Melendez were responsible for the cutting, packaging, storing and delivery of methamphetamine to customers, as well as for the packaging, storing and delivery of cocaine.

The indictment alleges that the members of the Ortega Drug Trafficking Organization used hidden storage locations for multi-pound caches of methamphetamine and cocaine, such as buckets buried in the ground beneath a chicken coop at a commercial location in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, where some workers for the organization were employed, concealed compartments in a trailer in a Nottingham, Pennsylvania trailer park, and containers buried outside that trailer. It is also alleged that defendants Victor Ortega, Jose Luis Ortega, Rolando Martes-Ortega and Isidro Cortez-Melendez, as well as Rogelio Ortega, were responsible for arranging the delivery of methamphetamine and cocaine to customers of the organization. According to the indictment, to avoid law enforcement detection, these defendants coordinated shipment, payment, packaging and distribution activities over multiple cellular telephones, used coded language when speaking over the telephone, took counter-surveillance actions, and carried out drug transactions in remote, rural locations, in order to thwart law enforcement surveillance and detection of their illegal activities.

“It is not a coincidence that this operation was being run out of southern Chester County. Roger Ortega believed that by carrying out drug transactions in rural, remote locations he would avoid detection by law enforcement. He was wrong,” said Meehan.

It is also alleged that shipments of methamphetamine from California and Mexico were sent to the Ortega Drug Trafficking Organization in southern Chester County concealed in the transmission transfer cases of “load” vehicles. According to the indictment, defendants Mark Cole, Victor Ortega and Isidro Cortez-Melendez provided assistance to Rogelio Ortega in removing the drugs from those vehicles and Mark Cole assisted Rogelio Ortega in re-packing such “load” vehicle transfer cases with large sums of United States currency for payment to the organization’s California and Mexico based drug suppliers.

According to the indictment, on September 18, 2006, law enforcement agents seized a shipment of 22 pounds of methamphetamine (actual), or “crystal meth,” and 31 kilograms of cocaine delivered to the Ortega Drug Trafficking Organization from defendants Humberto Avila and Pedro Gutierrez, California-based suppliers for the organization. It is alleged that defendant Mario Samaniego had transported this shipment concealed in a tractor-trailer wheel in the trailer of a tractor-trailer rig and delivered it to a truck stop near Lancaster, Pennsylvania to workers for the Ortega organization. Also on September 18, 2006, DEA and other law enforcement agents executed search warrants in various locations in southern Chester County and seized approximately six kilograms of methamphetamine and drug trafficking paraphernalia from a Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania stash location where Ortega Drug Trafficking Organization workers were employed, approximately \$340,000 in United States currency, including \$313,000 from the Newark Road,

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Toughkenamon residence of kingpin Rogelio Ortega, and \$10,000 each from the premises of two other defendants/workers for the organization, as well as several rifles and a handgun. The indictment further alleges that over \$300,000 in drug proceeds had been seized by law enforcement authorities in December 2005 and July 2006 from drug couriers transporting payments from the Ortega Drug Trafficking Organization to California and Mexico based drug suppliers. The indictment seeks criminal forfeiture of drug proceeds and facilitating property.

Defendants Victor Ortega, Jose Luis Ortega, Jose Luis Vasquez, Rolando Martes-Ortega and Isidro Cortez-Melendez were arrested in Chester County on September 18, 2006. They are currently incarcerated pursuant to federal pretrial detention orders. Defendants Humberto Avila and Pedro Gutierrez were arrested outside their residence in Fontana, California on September 18, and are also incarcerated pursuant to federal pretrial detention orders. A search of Avila, Gutierrez and their Fontana, California residence yielded approximately \$110,000 in cash which Avila was carrying at the time of his arrest, approximately four kilograms of cocaine and approximately 6 ½ pounds of methamphetamine. Defendant Mark Cole was arrested by federal law enforcement agents today. Defendant Rogelio Ortega is currently a fugitive.

If convicted, the defendants face the following maximum possible sentences:

Rogelio Ortega- Life imprisonment, a mandatory minimum 20 year prison term, a multi-million dollar fine, 10 years supervised release up to lifetime supervised release.

Victor Ortega - Life imprisonment, a mandatory minimum 20 year prison term, a multi-million dollar fine, 10 years supervised release up to lifetime supervised release.

Humberto Preciado Avila - Life imprisonment, a mandatory minimum 10 year prison term, a multi-million dollar fine, 5 supervised release up to lifetime supervised release.

Pedro Gutierrez - Life imprisonment, a mandatory minimum 20 year prison term, a multi-million dollar fine, 10 years supervised release up to lifetime supervised release.

Jose Luis Ortega - Life imprisonment, a mandatory minimum 20 year prison term, a multi-million dollar fine, 10 years supervised release up to lifetime supervised release.

Jose Luis Vasquez - Life imprisonment, a mandatory minimum 10 year prison term, a multi-million dollar fine, 5 years supervised release up to lifetime supervised release.

Rolando Martes-Ortega - Life imprisonment, a mandatory minimum 10 year prison term, a multi-million dollar fine, 5 years supervised release up to lifetime supervised release.

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Isidro Cortez-Melendez - Life imprisonment, a mandatory minimum 20 year prison term, a multi-million dollar fine, 10 years supervised release up to lifetime supervised release.

Mario Samaniego - Life imprisonment, a mandatory minimum 10 year prison term, a multi-million dollar fine, 5 years supervised release up to lifetime supervised release.

Mark Cole - Life imprisonment, a mandatory minimum 10 year prison term, a multi-million dollar fine, 5 years supervised release up to lifetime supervised release.

INFORMATION REGARDING THE DEFENDANTS

NAME	ADDRESS	AGE OR DATE OF BIRTH
Rogelio Ortega	Newark Road, Toughkenamon, PA	43
Victor Ortega	Newark Road Toughkenamon, PA	45
Humberto Preciado Avila	Canvasback Way Fontana, CA	39
Pedro Gutierrez	Canvasback Way Fontana, CA	36
Jose Luis Ortega	Penn Green Road Landenberg, PA	48
Jose Luis Vasquez	Gap Newport Pike Cochranville, PA	45
Rolando Martes-Ortega	W. 4 th Street Wilmington, DE	35
Mario Samaniego	unknown	37
Mark Cole	Kelton Road West Grove, PA	42

The case was investigated by the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (“DEA”), Philadelphia Field Division, assisted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (“FBI”), and Immigration & Customs Enforcement (“ICE”), along with the Pennsylvania State Police and the New Garden Police Department. The case has been assigned to Assistant United States Attorneys Joseph T. Labrum III and K.T. Newton.

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